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ABSTRACT

This unit of study (for grades 5-8 and up) about the U.S. Civil War features original documents from the National Archives and Records Administration. All the records used in the unit reflect the actions of the federal government or citizens' responses to these actions. These records were selected for their historical value, their legibility and clarity, and their appeal to students. The unit provides a list of 42 historical documents. Classroom activities are divided into 30 lessons, listed under the following headings: (1) "Introductory Exercises"; (2) "Toward the Civil War"; (3) "The Civil War"; and (4) "Reconstruction." The rationale for using primary sources in instructional units such as this one is that students, by personally connecting with the past, research more deeply, learn more intensely, retain what they have learned, and appreciate the inconsistencies, gaps, and human complexities with which professional historians grapple. The unit's primary sources advance students' knowledge of core documents and images in history and develop their higher-level thinking skills, which include the following: extracting information; separating fact from opinion; classifying information; developing and testing hypotheses; identifying contradictions and gaps in information and recognizing limitations in the historical record; interpreting and revising interpretations when warranted by the introduction of new information; weighing generalizations; comparing and contrasting information; and analyzing cause and effect. An issue of "Cobblestone" magazine related to the unit's topic also is included. (BT)

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